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# **Sustainable Fashion Trend**

# Enhancing Sustainability in Fashion Through Visual Communication Media

#### Giulia Scalera

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#### **Keywords**

Deep&Deal, Fashionability, Sustainable Trends, Brand Activism, Fashion Communication.

#### **Abstract**

From the French Fashion Pat to the Green in Italy brand, governments set sustainability targets to be achieved in the short term, indicating precise dates as an upper limit for reducing environmental impact in the fashion industry. From the Sustainability Manifesto, drawn up by the National Chamber for Italian Fashion, to that defined by the Fashion Revolution association, there are many programmes and objectives identified for the promotion of a sustainable approach in the fashion system. The main objective is to ensure fair and respectful behaviour that acts on the entire supply chain with zero impact actions and productions.

But despite the political actions and the rich literature on the subject, in fact, as K. Fletcher says, there is still a real difficulty and slowness with which sustainability becomes a constant practice, and a working method within the fashion system itself (2018, p. 7).

In the light of the many actions already launched by scholars and designers but not yet widely applied in the fashion system, the article underlines the need to raise awareness and guide companies towards the main themes of sustainability. A dissemination imagined through the design of widely diffused communication products able to enhance the best practices and the main sustainable models already present in the literature.

# 1. The Sustainable Responsibility of Fashion Between Alliances, Posters and Corporate Communication

# 1.1. The Role of the Institutions: Pacts, Brands and Green Certifications

In 2013, Domus magazine published the supplement Domus Green, in which sustainability emerged as a fundamental factor in the project that needed to be reflected on from the perspective of prevention, since it was not possible to imagine "acting solely under the ancestral impetus of immediate necessity" (Curzi & Zamboni, 2013) To date, however, we have come to operate with a global health emergency (Covid-19) in progress, and in this state, strained between chaos and uncertainty, the only true fixed point is the sustainable responsibility of the company that in the fashion sector records alarming data of unsustainability.

Since Friedman stated that "there is only one social responsibility of the company, and that is to use its resources in the development of activities aimed at increasing profits, obviously respecting the rules of the game, i.e. in an open, fair and competitive market" (1970) stakeholder theory has broadly broadened the definition and meaning of social responsibility, giving companies more widespread and prospective social commitments. They are widespread because they are addressed to both primary and secondary stockholder and prospective because they are oriented towards the environment and future generations.

A commitment that companies inscribe in the CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) chapter through a programme of commitments and actions that guarantee the correct and ethical

The international debate that compares fashion and sustainability has increased considerably over the last decade, with many initiatives and projects launched by governments, associations and companies.

In particular, in Italy, the CNMI association (Camera Nazionale della Moda Italiana) promotes the Sustainability Manifesto for Fashion in June 2012; a detailed ten-point decalogue aimed at promoting, encouraging and directing the industrial fabric of Italian fashion towards ethical and sustainable behaviour. The Decalogue focuses on the value of design, inviting designers and companies to design products that last over time while minimizing the impact on ecosystems so that new fashion products can unhinge the fast offer model, according to which, as Bauman states, "products are designed for immediate consumption, preferably for one-time use, disposal and quick replacement, so that living spaces do not remain cluttered when the objects admired and coveted today are out of fashion" (2004). In the political sphere, one of the main international agreements Made in Europe comes from France is the Fashion Pat which, signed by 56 leading brands in the fashion and textile sector, aims to achieve a series of objectives focused on three main areas: stopping global warming, restoring biodiversity and protecting the oceans. The Fashion Pat, entrusted by

French President Emmanuel Macron to François-Henri Pinault, President and CEO of Kering, was presented to heads of state at the G7 summit in Biarritz with the aim of structuring an international group that can take substantial sustainable action. From America it is California that organized the SAC - Sustainable Apparel Coalition - alliance promoting coalition pacts between fashion companies that unite for sustainability. In particular, the SAC, in addition to promoting coalitions between companies, has developed the Higg Index, a suite of tools that standardizes the measurement of sustainability along the entire fashion supply chain. The Higg Index identifies 11 assets for environmental assessment and 16 social impacts of great importance on which the sustainable performance assessment method is based. Through these parameters, companies can identify fragile points in their supply chain and continuously improve sustainability performance to achieve the environmental and social transparency required by consumers. Consumers, who are now increasingly educated as well as consciously choosing their products and services, choose one brand over another, with the aim not only of sharing a style and symbolic status, but also of belonging to philosophies and approaches characterized by a profound cultural value in contemporary society. Consumers, in fact, are considered as producers of cultures rather than aseptic messengers (Basile, 2013).

In addition to international agreements, there are many brands and sustainability certificates issued by government bodies and associations that certify the sustainable commitment of fashion companies. Among the main associations, the Dutch Fire Wear, with 137 member companies, produces detailed annual sustainability reports drawn up according to a series of criteria and values that certify the real commitment of companies in the fashion industry. The interesting aspect of this organization is the public suspension of certification as soon as the company does not meet the required standards. This communication model reinforces transparency policies, so that sustainability is not a marketing strategy "to give a firm a green tinge" (Polonsky et. al., 1997), avoiding the phenomenon of greenwashing.

Brands and certifications that hybridize fashion and sustainability in addition to enhancing a single brand can also strengthen the brand reputation of local brands. Several reports accuse the production models of some big names in Italian fashion, who, despite relocation, affix the *Made in Italy* label to their products. A modus operandi that not only damages the single brand but also the image of the entire country. In this scenario, the Ministry of the Environment for the Protection of the Territory and the Environment has established the *Made Green in Italy* label. The label protects companies that base their products on the logic of the LCA (Life Cycle Assessment) with a certificate drawn up according to the European approach of the PEF (Product Environmental Footprint) that integrates the "traditional" method to the environmental assessment of product/service with the Environmental Product Declarations (DAP - EPD) according to ISO 14025. From the cases described so far emerges a general orientation of the fashion industry towards *Deep&Deal* models, based on a deep and articulated capacity to establish new environmental pacts between industry and institutions. Agreements between generational, corporate and social interlocutors (Morace, 2020).

# 1.2. The Role of Companies: the Double Register of Corporate Communication for Sustainability

While up to now we have talked about the actions taken by governments and associations, sustainability initiatives also proliferate in the strategic plans of large fashion groups and individual companies, with programs acting on a double register. One tends to optimize the impact of fashion on the environment while the other concerns the ethical awareness of the end customer towards sustainability issues. Bernard Arnault President and CEO of LVMH, says, "our position of leadership involves environmental and social responsibility. We must go beyond mere compliance with standards" (<a href="https://www.lvmh.it/il-gruppo/i-nostri-impegni/responsabilita-sociale-e-ambientale/">https://www.lvmh.it/il-gruppo/i-nostri-impegni/responsabilita-sociale-e-ambientale/</a>), as the focus is on both an interest in the environment and action towards people.

Marie-Claire Daveu of the Kering group also believes that, in the interview *Per un lusso sostenibile*, published on the group's institutional website, Marie-Claire Daveu speaks out on the thesis that great powers give rise to great responsibilities (Tonfi, 2017). In fact, the manager underlines both the importance of sustainable duty towards the environment and the role of "super brands" as forerunners, to guide small and medium enterprises towards sustainability, to the point of positively influencing consumers as well.

# 1.2.1. Register One. Towards the Environment

With respect to point one of sustainable business planning, the LVMH LIFE Program emerges, strengthened in 2016 with LVMH LIFE 2020. The group has identified 4 main objectives around which to work to ensure the sustainability of

their *maisons*. The objectives are: Product Objective, aimed at improving production models; Supply Chain Objective, developed with particular interest in the traceability and recruitment of primary resources; CO2 Objective, focused on reducing harmful emissions by 25% in all the group's complexes; Sites Objective, which promotes a minimum reduction of 10% in environmental performance indicators, in addition to a commitment by the individual *maisons* to improve their environmental impact by 15%.

Prada also does solid work in the sustainable field. In particular, during the last edition of the *Shaping a Future* conference, the company promoted the need to act according to the logic of multilateralism, hybridizing local know-how with global actions. A direction that goes towards the *Green New Deal* proposed before the pandemic by the EU. According to the speakers at the Summit, it is only through shared policies between countries that it will be possible to launch valid programs capable of guiding the fashion system towards a new productive and commercial essence that, passing through culture, returns new models of consumption.

"Liberal humanism" has brought great progress in human rights and economic development. At the same time, however, it has developed individualism and consumerism. Today it is not a question of opposing growth and degrowth, but of inviting reflection on what is useful and what is useless and harmful. If we look around us, we see a great number of initiatives that we could define as oases of fraternity. We must try to create a network of relationships for the harmonious integration of these oases, because the problems that are obscuring our future are such that they cannot be tackled alone and call for

collaboration and solidarity (Massi, 2020). Launching complex networks of sustainable cooperation that guide society towards a new civilization based on connected logics made of interaction between company, stakeholders, shareholders and public institutions. In order for proactive exchanges to take place between the parties, it is also important to act on the awareness of all stakeholders with the aim of transforming people's sustainable sensitivity towards a culture of sustainability, as Miuccia Prada says (<a href="https://www.pradagroup.com/it/sustainability/prada-impact/sustainability-strategy-UN-17sdgs.html">https://www.pradagroup.com/it/sustainability/prada-impact/sustainability-strategy-UN-17sdgs.html</a>) "You have to understand deeply what it does mean not being sustainable. Culture is the only way".

## 1.2.2. Register Two. Towards People

From the analysis conducted, not only does the need for action emerge, but also the need for short-term results. Posters, pacts, call to action, always include an expiry date as the maximum limit for reducing environmental impact in the fashion sector.



Figure 1. Climate Clock. International awareness campaign to encourage sustainable actions.

A time that also becomes manifesto and action through the Climate clock campaign that unites artists, scientists and activists in a community with the aim of fighting environmental disaster. The campaign involves the installation of a physical *Climate* clock in cities, schools, companies or even the use of a digital climate clock to be used on websites, social pages and more generally to be extended to virtual interfaces. Currently the clocks can be found on the historic gasometer in Berlin, in Union Square in New York City and in front of the Louvre in Paris. Sudbury and Böltner (2011) have shown that consumers are more likely to choose lower priced products rather than products with higher sustainability standards, even when they are more aware of ethical fashion. In this scenario, it is therefore essential to launch communication plan aimed at raising user awareness with the aim of both influencing consciences and stimulating concrete behaviour. The Gucci company, through the Gucci Equilibrium communication plan (https://equilibrium.gucci.com), shows particular attention to ethical and sustainable awareness actions through multiple projects such as the Gucci Surf game. An Arcade style game that combines the world of gaming, fashion, sport and respect for the environment. Chosen as virtual testimonial Leonardo Fioravante (one of the best Italian surfers in the world), the player is called upon to eliminate plastic from the sea through a game that aims to raise awareness and educate users towards small behaviors that educate them to respect the environment. These initiatives show and demonstrate the power of digital in fashion that through gamification dialogues with the new generations. Those that more than any other will most likely succeed in implementing concrete virtuous models of the circular economy.





**Figures 2-3.** Gucci Surf. Arcade-style video game designed by Gucci to combat plastic pollution in the oceans.

Analysing the many activities promoted by large fashion groups, it emerges that the conversion towards sustainability takes place gradually and in progressive steps through actions that often represent a small percentage among the many activities carried out by large companies. These percentages, observed from a communication point of view, should be enhanced with visual campaigns showing the real impact of those numbers on the environment. Showing how these apparently small percentages have a major sustainable impact. In this perspective, we also highlight the need to encourage small and medium-sized enterprises with information and training campaigns aimed at demonstrating that, even through small steps (and with small investments), they can cooperate in a general and substantial global change.

# 2. The Role of Visual Communication Between Fashion and Sustainability

# 2.1. A Tool for Orientation in the Vast Panorama of Sustainable Fashion

Despite the political actions and the rich literature on the subject, in fact, as K. Fletcher says, there is still a real difficulty and slowness with which sustainability becomes a constant practice, and a working method within the fashion system itself (2018). A difficulty encountered in particular by small and medium enterprises that find themselves having to convert their business models into a single container, scattered between actions, brands and certifications not yet systematized. The same disorientation is found in training. In fact, young students often find themselves navigating through a multi-

In the light of the many actions already designated by scholars and designers and still little applied in the re-foundation of the fashion system, and also in the accentuated condition of disorientation (due to Covid-19) in which many companies find themselves having to re-emerge, the need to collect and enhance the best practices and the main sustainable models already present in the literature is highlighted. A need that, addressed through the skills of visual communication, finds an answer thanks to the design of a visual apparatus capable of changing people's attitudes towards health, safety and other social concerns, aware of the impact that visual communication has on people's attitudes, knowledge and behavior (Frascara, Meurer, Van Toorn, & Winkler, 1997).

The need to identify new communication strategies to "influence" people towards sustainability issues also emerges in the volume *Green marketing. Come evitare la greenwashing comunicando al mercato il valore della sostenibilità* (Iraldo & Melis, 2012). The authors highlight the lack of concrete tools to support companies in the migration process that goes from a heavy industry to a "light" one, where light means the ability to produce revenues in compliance with all the parameters of sustainability.

The Sustainable Fashion Trend map was created from these analyses with the aim of identifying, promoting and enhancing the main trends and design models useful for the launch of sustainable practices. Trends that are not linked to a season because, as Blanchard says, sustainability is a trend they are here to stay (2007). They are in fact stable trends that do

A mapping that collects in a single container the possibilities that companies have to convert to sustainability. A communication tool imagined as a *vademecum* of sustainability in fashion so that it can guide companies to become adept at generating profits not only according to the standards of the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) but also through design and communication skills.

We are experiencing a moment of profound transformation in which the role of visual communication in fashion goes from being fundamental in retail (Chan & Wong, 2012) to becoming indispensable for developing a work process in a sustainable direction (Cervellon & Wernerfelt, 2012).

### 2.2. Map Structure

Initial surveys have shown that the sustainable fashion landscape, despite being in a definition phase, is characterized by several research-action lines. From the technologies developed to launch low environmental impact production to the definition of new distribution chains, we can identify sustainable macro trends involving multiple sustainability actions. The "trends" proposed in the map are divided into three strands involving feasible design and production aspects on the *brand philosophy*, *project approach* and *quantitative and qualitative valuation* of sustainability.

The three strands are described on the basis of three predominant factors identified in *values*, *actions* and *benefit*.

The first mega trend, which affects the company philosophy, is represented by two main approaches that characterize the

For slow fashion, the value of time is highlighted as the main point of interest, which has a very complex and multifaceted role in the fashion industry. In fact, we talk about time in the seasonality and in the releases of the collections, production time and duration of the product. The concept of slow fashion, introduced by Kate Fletcher (2008) is and the basic principle around which to rethink the fashion industry, reflecting on the slowness of production, sales and consumption. The theme of ethical fashion is distinguished by the value placed on people. The action that makes a company ethically correct focuses on the willingness offered to people to work in good conditions and with a fair salary. The main impact is internal, both for employees and stakeholders. The benefits are also clearly reflected in the company itself, which improves the quality of its employees' work and increases their performance, initiating a virtuous circuit that leads to an improvement in product and service and therefore in revenue.

To the extent that it is absurd to claim that companies serve society better by simply ignoring all profits except corporate profits (Greenfield, 2005), the logic of ethical fashion in addition to corporate welfare also has a very important impact on the economy of people and countries, particularly the poorest ones. Companies that implement ethical fashion policies also raise their brand reputation.

The second strand focuses on *design methodologies* that are mainly aimed at reducing environmental impact. The line is declined in two design possibilities: upcycled and circular fashion.

**Figure 4.** G. Scalera. *Sustainable fashion trend. Fashion's approaches to respect the planet.* Infographic collecting the main sustainable trends in fashion.

Upcycled also acts on the value of time, extending the life of the product by combining creativity with the concept of recovering products that have remained unsold or fallen into disuse. The fallout is environmental, considering the recovery of products that would otherwise end up in landfill. Big brands such as Prada, with the Prada Re-nylon project or Levis with Re-done, are some of the best examples that show the action to be activated in this sense. That is, the creation of capsule collections or new brands that spread the sustainable soul of zero impact fashion.

Circular Fashion, on the other hand, provides for the re-foundation of the fashion supply chain; its fundamental value is therefore the *cradle-to-cradle* principle. The principle lies in

the ability to preserve and enhance the ecosystems and biological cycles of nature, while maintaining production cycles. The action acts through a holistic model in which the industrial, social and economic dimensions cooperate compatibly with the environment. In fact, the latter is the object of the benefit of circular fashion.

The third strand deals with issues related to *sustainability assessment* analyzed through the emerging phenomenon of Cost per Wear and Eco-Friendly Fashion.

The first tool also has time as its value, but in this case, it lies in the relationship between the cost of the garment and the time of use. The main action acts on a commercial basis and in this particular case communication campaigns are of fundamental importance. The direct impact of this commitment is in environmental terms, but this trend also pushes companies to improve the quality of their products.

Eco Friendly Fashion is the last aspect presented in the map, the value in this case is the environmental impact expressed through two main nodes, the carbon footprint and the water footprint. The action to be implemented, considered by companies to be even the most difficult, is the production of products by considerably reducing the use and pollution of natural, environmental and landscape resources. The fallout is clearly aimed at protecting and safeguarding the environment.

In addition to the three strands, the mapping puts the entire supply chain on a level that involves sustainable fabrics for their ability to involve many sectors.

The proliferation of sustainable actions in fashion make Sustainable Fashion Trend mapping an open and constantly evolving system. Its shape changes and is enriched by the evolution of the sector which, woven from multiple aspects, requires fashion companies to be increasingly able to intercept and follow the trend of sustainability.

### 3. Conclusion

Analyses carried out to date show that there is a need to organise design research into tools and methods capable of converting fashion companies into sustainable businesses. The entire fashion supply chain urgently needs a concrete and measurable conversion of the system, and in this emergency design, with all its fields of investigation, from strategy to communication, from planning to production, as well as playing a central role in the redesign of the system, has a social and ethical responsibility towards the planet and the people who work in the fashion industry.

The Sustainable Fashion Trend map is in fact an action of "responsible communication" (initiated within the framework of a Research Grant from the University of Campania Luigi Vanvitelli) aimed at contributing to the public dissemination of methods and strategies capable of converting fashion companies into sustainable realities. From this point of view, the aim is also to bring the world of research closer to that of companies, which have always been divided between theory and practice. But at a time of great change, accentuated by a global pandemic, a time when fashion must necessarily restart according to new logics, research, which seemed to open up distant scenarios, now seems closer than ever, concrete and supporting activities to reemerge from the global crisis in which we still find ourselves.

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She is conducting her studies at the intersection of Design and Science, in particular related to the application of biologic processes in substitution of the conventional manufacturing processes, in order to exploit their potentiality in terms of new aesthetics, languages and fruitions patterns. She has conducted several department researches and experimentations in the field of biomaterials, obtained from the re-use of organic waste from the agri-food chain, and collaborated as teaching assistant on the topic. She is actually part of the team of the Interdepartmental Center Saperi&Co of Sapienza University.

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Visiting Professor at the School of Fashion and Design (SOFD) of the GD Goenka University in Gurgaon (New Delhi, India) and at the EDC Business School (Ecole des Dirigeants et des Créateurs d'entreprise) in Paris.

From 2011 to 2020, she has been a contract lecturer at the School of Design of the Politecnico di Milano and from 2009 to 2018 research fellow at the Design dept of the Politecnico di Milano, developing research on communication for the fashion system and on the relationships between design, culture and territory.

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For over 20 years she worked in projects in Ethiopia, Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Yemen, Jordan, Haiti, with the most important national and international donors WHC - UNESCO, UNCCD, World Bank, European Commission, WMF, AICS. Since 2011 she has been collaborating with the DIDA UNIFI especially in projects around Maghreb countries and in the social field promoting Social Design projects and workshops using co-design methodologies.

She is professor of Service Design at DIDA UNIFI, professor of Design for Cultural Heritage in the License Course in Design at Ecole Euro-Méditerranéen d'Architecture Design et Urbanisme de l'Université Euro-Méditerranéene de Fès EMADU – UEMF in Morocco and visiting professor in some universities in Mediterranean countries. debora.giorgi@unifi.it

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Main focus of his line of research are parametric design, medical design, and advanced manufacturing – knowledge acquired during his academic path. The Ph.D. course with industrial characterization has allowed him to carry out and consolidate his research activity, as well as at his university, also at the Escuela Técnica Superior de Ingeniería y Diseño Industrial (Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, Spain) and a company from Campania, based in Gricignano di Aversa, to design a system of innovative orthopedic devices through parametric design.

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#### Elena Pucci

A graduate of the CDLM in Fashion System Design, is interested in art, music and writing. She coordinates the virtual lab at DIDA (Department of Architecture) of the University of Florence (Italy), Design Campus section. Currently she works in communication projects of and for CDLM in Fashion System Design. She was involved in "Metamorphic Fashion Design" offering her contribution in the design of environments, as well as in the collection and organization of material. elena.pucci@stud.unifi.it

#### **Paolo Pupparo**

Graduated from the Master's Degree in Design at the University of Florence, currently a PhD student in "Sustainability and innovation for the built environment and product system design (cycle XXXVI - a.y. 2020/2021). During his research interests concerning the development of methodologies applied to creative processes.

He is currently engaged in the research project: "Design, Art and Business: innovation, strategy and sustainable channels for the creation of value", which focuses on the analysis and collection of information relating to the mapping of the relationships between Design, Contemporary Art and Companies starting from the Tuscan territory.

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Her areas of interest are focused on the following themes: Fashion Design, Trend Studies, Scenarios, Consumer Culture, Qualitative Research, Methodologies.

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#### Giulia Scalera

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Since 2015 she has been teaching fashion and communication design courses at the Accademia delle Belle Arti di Napoli. Since 2009 she has been working as a professional visual designer and in 2017 she is co-founder of the Pluff design studio specialized in visual communication projects of national and international importance.

Among the main projects are the visual identity of the Italian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale (2015) and the creative direction of Milano Book City.

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#### **Juliet Seger**

She is a vocationally trained tailor, clothing engineer and designer. Her academic path at The University for Applied Sciences Hamburg (Clothing – Technology and Management B. Eng., 2019) and The University of Edinburgh (Design for Change MA, 2020) was paired with diverse practical experience in the fashion industry. Following placements in bespoke tailoring and an extensive tailoring training with the HOLY Fashion Group, she worked as technical designer and studio manager for menswear designer Alex Mullins in London and spent one season with Proenza Schouler in New York. For several years she led sewing workshops for children and supported the student sewing lab at HAW Hamburg. Her label PAID VACATION functions as creative platform for contemporary tailoring and made-to-order fashion design. Since Autumn 2020 Juliet is based in Berlin where she works as fashion product developer. **juliet@paidvacation.de** 

#### Sónia Seixas

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#### Renato Stasi

He has been involved in the creation of clothing and accessories collections for the fashion segment for almost thirty years, as a designer and responsible for the development of the collection, he has worked for several companies including the LVMH Group, Redwall, Hettabretz. He is an adjunct professor at the DIDA - UNIFI Department of Architecture, in the CDL in Industrial Design and CDLM Fashion System Design. Lecturer at IED, where he is the coordinator of two three-year courses. He has carried out supplementary teaching activities at the Politecnico di Milano for several years. He has held seminars and workshops in various universities. Stasi is Coordinator of the Steering Committee of the Master's Degree Course in Fashion System Design of the University of Florence - School of Architecture - DIDA.

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Designer, PhD in Design. Currently a research fellow at DIDA (Department of Architecture) of the University of Florence (Italy), Design Campus section. The PhD thesis, with the title "future heritage and heritage futures. An exploration on meanings of the digitized Cultural Heritage" aimed at investigating the role that the digital archives of Cultural Heritage can have in the contamination between the culture of the past and contemporary creativity.

Her research interests concern the heritage/creativity sphere within the digital evolution; thus, the application, impact and opportunities that lie in the relationship between digital technologies and cultural heritage. She is currently working on a research project titled "Living archive. Disseminating and reusing the Fashion cultural heritage" founded by Regione Toscana.

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#### **Kellie Walters**

She is a color, materials, and finishes (CMF) designer at Garmin International and previously at Newell Brands spanning professional experience in consumer electronics and home goods. She is also a published researcher on trend forecasting and CMF trends as well as a published theorist on future aesthetics after artificial general intelligence is created and society heads toward artificial superintelligence. Kellie is focused on the direct impact that social and political events have on future aesthetics and their relationship with the economics of design.

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